From: Freedman, Joel
To: 'Ryan, James (TPE)'; Davidson, William A.; Dehghani, Youssef; McKinstry, Dawn; Scheibe, Mark; Harper, Elizabeth; Donnelly, Bob; Dowell, Marie-Elsie
Sent: 8/24/2005 2:43:01 PM
Subject: RE: Concurrent New Starts and EIS Project Question

Hi Jim (and all),

Thanks very much for that explanation of the FTA position – which I believe we all understand and concur with. In fact, our experience in SF has been exactly as you describe – using the model to present a range of forecasts, from holding certain components of the model system constant (such as trip distribution) to the other extreme of allowing all components to vary, even to the extent of running the model system multiple times with varying random number seeds to see how the ridership varies overall and at a station level (not much). Of course, some of those tests are special cases only available in the context of a stochastic tour-based model. However, the results seem to be well-received, at least on the part of the engineers working on the FEIS and design team. On this project, I am sensing some resistance to a range of forecasts, perhaps because of the dynamics of Portland region politics and special interests arguing over what may be 'the real number', regardless of the qualifications we as modelers make on how the range of ridership forecasts were generated.

All that aside for the moment, we are probably not the first ones to face going through an EIS and potential New Starts submittals simultaneously...or are we?? Assuming we aren't, what has been the experience of others? Have the numbers been released as a range of ridership forecasts, and to whom? What has been the reaction, political or otherwise?

-joel

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-----Original Message-----
From: Ryan, James (TPE) [mailto:James.Ryan@fta.dot.gov]
Sent: Wednesday, August 24, 2005 3:22 PM
To: Freedman, Joel; Davidson, William A.; Dehghani, Youssef; McKinstry, Dawn; Scheibe, Mark; Harper, Elizabeth; Donnelly, Bob; Dowell, Marie-Elsie
Subject: RE: Concurrent New Starts and EIS Project Question

Hi folks:

To borrow from the army, I think it's useful to consider Joel's question in terms of the right way, the wrong way, and the FTA way. Nobody here at FTA pretends that the fixed-trip-table approach is the "right" way to make forecasts for major transit projects. The right way is to apply carefully developed models of travel behavior that capture as much travel behavior as possible -- including likely changes in overall travel patterns caused by large increases in transit accessibility and "congestion relief." We do, however, value the constaints introduced by the FTA way, including the reduced risk of over-predicting ridership on New Starts projects (still the bane of -- and threat to -- our existence) and the more equitable evaluation of projects from the (majority of) urban areas whose trip-distribution models are insensitive to transit service levels.

So, we think that the "two different transit forecasts" include (1) the best-available forecast from the full application of well-developed local models, and (2) a restricted version used for one specific purpose -- FTA's evaluation on a level, national playing field.

One option for local presentation of the two forecasts is simply to say that FTA requires a special-purpose forecast for national-evaluation reasons.

But a better option, I think, is to grasp the insights that should be available from the differences between the two forecasts (and we're all in the business of producing insights, not just numbers!!). The fixed-trip-table forecast is a prediction of how well the alternatives will serve the travel patterns that are anticipated in the corridor. The variable-

trip-table forecast is a prediction of how many additional riders might show up because some folks will probably change their travel patterns to take advantage of the new facility. The difference between the two is, at least, longer term and less certain -- and it sheds some light on what you might well want to say about uncertainties in the forecasts and the range of possible ridership outcomes.

So, my bottom line is that the two different forecasts are a helpful contribution to our common efforts to shed light on the probable impacts of alternative projects -- efforts that ought to focus less on a few grand-total numbers marooned in unfathomable tables and more on (1) the insights that we can derive from the forecasts, (2) the discussions that we can craft to convey those insights to our audiences, and ultimately (3) the compelling argument that we can advance for the project proposals that emerge from our analyses.

Hope that helps. It would surely help those of us trying to understand proposed projects in terms of problems, performance, benefits, and (ultimately) overall project merit that are largely available only from the travel forecasts.

I'd be really interested in hearing other thoughts on this.

Thanks.
Jim
-----Original Message-----
From: Freedman, Joel [mailto:Freedman@pbworld.com]
Sent: Wednesday, August 24, 2005 5:05 PM
To: Davidson, William A.; Dehghani, Youssef; McKinstry, Dawn; Scheibe, Mark; Harper, Elizabeth; Donnelly, Bob; Dowell, Marie-Elsie
Cc: Ryan, James (TPE)
Subject: Concurrent New Starts and EIS Project Question
Importance: High

Hi folks,

I am peripherally involved in a project here in Portland (Columbia River Crossing) that is a EIS with a major transit component that will involve New Starts work. The EIS process typically requires alternatives analysis with dynamic trip distribution, while New Starts submittals are based on holding trip distribution constant. The alternatives being studied here will definitely have trip distribution affects - this is a highly congested facility with only one alternative route. The Metro trip distribution model also uses mode choice logsums as the measure of accessibility, so the introduction of transit on the I-5 bridge will affect trip distribution.

I would imagine that as part of a New Starts submittal, one would want to report both the 'fixed trip distribution' ridership number as well as the 'dynamic distribution' ridership number. However, there is some concern on the part of various project team members that two different transit forecasts (ridership numbers) will be problematic from a public perception and political perspective. I am wondering what has been your experience on such projects. Have the published ridership numbers been 'constrained', or have all forecasts been reported, and to whom?

Any help would be greatly appreciated.

Thanks,
-joel

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